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MEMORIES 1910 - 1959

AUBURN RUBBER COMPANY, INC.

A U B U R N



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FORWARD

There are many incidents that happened at the Auburn Rubber Company that the old employees will remember. There was the time that Don Leeson blew up a thinner drum and nearly took his head off the time we drilled our first car back well and hit gas rock the time Dawson Guaintence was building an addition and the cement block wall blew over on "food" staining the time

I would like to acknowledge all the people who helped refresh my memory. With the help of Bob Grimm, Clarren Boger, Cy McNabb, Ferd Thurman, John Haggerty, Evanelle Harshman, Harold Link, and several others I think we have listed the events in more or less chronological order.

Although I am not much of a writer I will try to give you some events that will help you remember others. I will have to show I remember it as well as the experiences of others I have talked to who remember things that I had forgotten.

I certainly was not a big factor in everything that happened but was just an employee that stuck his nose into anything new that went on. If some of the events are not as you remember them, and I am sure they will be, just excuse it as a poor memory.

When I say "we", "our", or "us" I mean the company and all the employees. All the credit for building the company from a small rubber company to a major producer of solid rubber items, especially toys, goes to the people that worked for Auburn Rubber.

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THE BEGINNING

It all started back in 1910 when two Auburn men, Mr. A.L. Murray and Mr. Bill Willennar, formed a partnership and in a small building in Auburn started producing inner liners and blow out patches for tires. In those days when the solid rubber tires were being replaced with pneumatic tires there was a market for products to repair tires and most anything that would make them last longer.

Mr. Murray was always a man with a thousand ideas and Mr. Willennar was a businessman who was able to sort out the ideas of his partner that would be profitable and that could be produced in a small factory.

Their business proved to be successful so it was decided to branch out. In 1913 the Model "T" Ford was becoming quite popular so they decided to build a plant and start making tires. They built the brick building that now stands as part of the Cooper Rubber Company. They called the company "The Double Fabric Tire Company". Tires didn't last too long on the roads of that time so they thought there would be a good market for replacement tires.

These tires were laid up by hand on round cores with strips of rubber impregnated fabric. They were mostly clincher type tires and the beads were precured in a long bead mold and then built into the layup for the carcass.

These raw layups were then placed in two piece molds and ten or twelve were placed in curing kettles under pressure and cured with steam.

Business was good for quite a while and then someone came out with a cord tire that was much better than the fabric tire and the business fell off.

To help business, hearsay says, they tried to make an economy tire. The story goes that if you could drive to Ft. Wayne and back on one of these tires you had a good buy. They also tried making cord tires but the process and the big tire companies nearly forced them to close completely.

Sometime during the late teens or early twenties Mr. Willennar got an offer from a company in New York to buy them out. He thought they should sell but Mr. Murray, rather than sell to an out of town firm, bought him out. Later Mr. Murray sold the company, but soon after bought it back as a corporation and it stayed in the corporation until it was sold in 1959.

About this time Mr. Murray came back from England with some shoe soles made from rubber that were cemented to shoes for home repair. He was enthused at the number of people using these soles over there and felt sure there would be a good market in the United States. He was right and this one item started to put the company back on its feet. He was able to get a Chicago firm to warehouse materials in the plant. This gave the company a supply of material and allowed them to pay for just what they used.

From this start the company kept adding products, sport soles, heels, soling sheets, toys, and many others until it was a major industry in Auburn. Mr. Murray was responsible for originating most of the new products that pulled the company from near bankruptcy to a growing profitable business.

1932

It all started for me in 1932 when I applied for and got a job at Auburn Rubber. At that time the main products were stick on soles, molded soles for sport shoes, heels, sponge rubber kneeling pads, and doormats. These doormats were molded out of left over stock from regular items, stock that was off color and any other odds and ends that were lying around. All this was milled together with some carbon black and chemicals and molded into doormats.

I was assigned to work for Ernest Batdorf (Batty) and he gave me a trimming knife and led me over to a stack of the mats that looked to me like it filled half the room. I was to trim, pile in bundles, wrap in paper, tie two ways with rope, pile on a truck and haul to the shipping room. With Batty breathing down your neck you had to keep busy and by the end of the day I wasn't sure I would be back the next day.

I finally caught up on the doormats and was put to work stocking the women sole trimmers and packers. Now, keeping a bunch of women in stock who had a quota to get out wasn't the easiest way for a kid out of high school to earn his twenty cents an hour. After the women let up on me the job got much better. There must have been something about Auburn Rubber because over the years a lot of the male employees married female employees. That is how I found my wife and she put up with me for nearly fifty four years.

The stick-on soles were cured in aluminum molds. The aluminum molds were cast by Walter Ball in a corner of the shop where he had set up a little foundry. Later he went into business for himself and set up his foundry in a building back of Foley Pattern Shop. This was the start of what is now the Ball Brass and Aluminum Foundry.

The castings were polished, machined, mounted on steel plates, and were ready for use. A thin piece of calendar stock was placed on the mold and a very thin piece of gum rubber with paper on the back was put on the stock. The whole thing was covered with a steel plate and shoved into the molding press and cured for a certain time with heat and pressure. The cured soles were then trimmed out of the sheets on beam clickers, packed in pairs in individual boxes with a tube of cement and a scraper, packed in cartons and sent to the shipping room. Later the shoes were stapled to cards and one dozen pairs were packed in chipboard boxes.

Sport soles were molded the same way except in steel molds, they were molded in a variety of colors, trimmed, packed and shipped to shoe factories for use on new shoes.

The sponge kneeling pads were a little like baking bread. If there isn't enough yeast in the dough the bread won't rise and the sponge rubber acts the same way if the chemicals are not right. They would have to run a sample of each batch to see whether it was going to cure right. They had to re-mix quite a lot of batches.

The rubber cement for the stick on soles was made in churns in a little shed outside the main plant. Gum rubber was cut up in small chunks and loaded into the churns with solvent and allowed to churn overnight. When it was ready and the rubber was all dissolved it was carried to the plant in five gallon pails and poured in the supply tank on the tuber and lead tubes were filled, the end crimped and they were ready to be packed with the soles. The problem with this job was that if you stayed in the cement shed too long when putting on a batch of cement, the smell of the solvent gave a person a beautiful drunk. Naturally, any newly hired stock boy got this job.

Regular heels were molded, trimmed, and packed in small boxes. One pair to a box with an envelope of nails and shipped to wholesalers to be sold by their customers for home shoe repair. The sport heels were packed bulk and sent to shoe factories.

At that time Louie Marks was running what we called the black mill for black stock. Louie would end up his shift blacker than coal and carbon black isn't the easiest dirt to wash off. When I first saw Louie I thought to myself, if that's what it's like to work at Auburn Rubber I would never start. Several years later a Banbury Mixer was installed and that eliminated most of the dirt.

Mabel Van Goiter (Big Mabel) cut most of the latex backing for the stick-on soles. Batty never seemed to bother Mabel too much and I found out why when I picked up her shears to cut open a bundle of corrugated cartons. Mabel had quite a temper.

There were many other employees back then that the new kid thought were a little hard nosed but after you got to know them they were all good people.

Those were the years when everyone put out a full day's work. When you got a two cent raise per hour you thought you had hit the jackpot. The Depression had started and people appreciated being able to work at a steady job.

TOYS

Sometime around 1934 the president of Auburn Rubber, Mr. Murray came back from a trip to England and brought a small molded palace guard soldier. Mr. Murray was always looking for items to produce and he thought rubber toys might be a good possibility. These were Depression Years and although the stick on soles were selling above normal, some of the other products were down a little.

He took the soldier to Foley Pattern and had a pattern made. A lead mold was made from the pattern and several samples were cured, trimmed, decorated by an artist in Ft. Wayne and presented to buyers. They were well received, and since there were rumors of a possible war in Europe, the first items that were made was a series of American soldiers. As I recall the soldiers were followed by a series of farm animals.

Since this was a new type of production from what we were familiar with and since there was very little equipment that could be purchased, we had to design and build our own. Molds were cast in aluminum, polished, machined, and assembled in steel frames. These molds were heavy and to open them after curing, chain hoists were installed over the press line.

The lab was kept busy during this time testing and making different compounds that would do the job. I think the compound was about seventy percent clay and the rest reclaimed rubber plus some chemicals for curing.

The second floor of the main building was cleaned out and made ready to install equipment for the toy operation. Cy McNabb was made foreman of the toy division and when production started picking up I was asked to go up and help him. Cy took care of all the painting and decorating. I took care of the trimming. We started out by buffing the flash from the toys with rag wheels. The boys on the buffing line came up with the idea that if they soaked the rag wheels in a thin solution of carton glue and water they could buff the trim off faster. It was ideas like this that helped Auburn Rubber grow in the toy business. Later we found a source that made us "nipper type" dies to trim off this flash.

After the toys were trimmed they had to be dipped and decorated. Several paint companies worked on making a paint that would adhere to rubber and still flex without cracking. We had a lot of trouble with paint when we started out but they finally solved the problems. Our machine shop came up with a dipping machine and racks to hang the toys on to dip the base coat. They then started building conveyors for the decorating lines. These conveyors were completely "Home Made" except for the belts and motors. We even had an order in at the local junk yard to save us all the old washing machine speed reducers they could acquire. Later we bought speed reducers from the Auburn Burner Co. that they used on oil burners. Even though all our equipment was "Home Made" it all did a very satisfactory job.

It was decided to make a line of toy cars and this caused a lot of new problems for us. Our machine shop knew how to build molds, and dipping the base coat was not a problem, but wheels and axles were new. The molds for the wheels were cut in steel plates with a hinged top and bottom plate, one half of the wheel in each plate. After molding they had to be trimmed. To do this it was decided they could be tumbled and this would wear the flash off the edges. The machine shop built our first tumbler from a big "hogshead" oak barrel that we got from a pickle factory over near St. Joe. They had olives shipped to their plant from Europe in these barrels. This first tumbler did the job, but was very slow so they built the next one with a hexagon shape, and this speeded the job up considerably. Later the tumblers were built of steel. Dry ice was added to make the flash brittle and make it break off easier. We did have some punch press dies built for trimming the large tractor wheels.

As I recall the first Cord cars were assembled with a round head, short nail through the wheel and into the body. They finally found a company that made a single head axle. To use these axles we had to assemble the wheels and axles to the body and then spin a head on the other end. We found a machine on the market that would do this job and bought several of them. The machine shop built fixtures to assemble the wheels and axles to the bodies which were operated by a foot pedal. Later air cylinders were used in place of the foot pedals.

During this time we were fortunate to have real good men in our machine shop. They could take someone's wild idea and turn it into a workable piece of equipment. There was a lot of "build and try on" in those days, but we were always able to come up with something that would do the job.

It was about this time that a brewery in Fort Wayne changed from wooden beer cases to fiber cases and we were able to buy two or three truck loads of these wooden cases. These were just the thing for stock boxes and they lasted a long while.

A couple other items that were finished in the toy department were sponge rubber A-B-C blocks and flyswatters.

The sponge blocks were molded and any flash was trimmed off by hand. They were molded in several colors. They were sent up to the toy department and the numbers and letters were silk screened on all six sides by Bert Imhoff. This was quite a job because they had to be put in racks for the paint to dry, before they could be turned to screen another side. After they were all screened they were packed by sets in boxes ready for shipping.

The flyswatters were cured and trimmed and sent to the toy department for assembly and packing. A tool shop in Hicksville built us a machine that would take a straight piece of wire and twist it into a handle with two prongs on one end to insert into the swatter blades. I would be afraid to guess how many of these swatters we made, but it had to be hundreds of thousands.

The toy business and our assembly and painting methods kept improving until we were forced to shut down because of the war. Toys were considered as non--essential items. Even then we kept experimenting with compounds that were on the non--essential list. We tried to make toys out of sawdust and glue, excelsior and lime, soybean flour and even old battery cases. None of these compounds were successful so we finally had to quit the toy business until after the war.

THE WAR YEARS

When war restrictions forced us to shut down production on our regular line of toys and civilian items, management was forced to find something we could produce to keep our machines and employees busy. All the government contracts were channeled through a procurement office in Chicago. Thanks to a lot of hard work by management and thanks to recommendations from shoe factories we had supplied with sport soles, we were able to land a contract to produce army full soles for shoe factories and to ship overseas for repair soles. This accounted for a large part of our production during the war. This was something we knew how to do because of our experience in producing sport soles for the shoe factories. The stock had to conform to government specs and had to be tested daily and a report given to the inspector. All parts of the operation were covered by rigid specs. As I recall the soles had to be trimmed and packed in a waterproof carton, steel strapped two ways and covered with a lot of stenciled numbers and descriptions. We even had a government inspector stationed in Auburn who had to stamp the cartons before they could be shipped. I guess his job got a little boring after a while because he left his stamp with Cy McNabb and bought several popcorn machines and set them up in the area theaters to make some extra income.

We made soling sheets before the war so we were able to pick up a contract to make stippled sheets for repair soles to send overseas. We didn't have too much trouble producing these sheets, but here again government specs were very rigid. Packing them for shipment was the most time consuming. After trimming they had to be packed twenty five or fifty, I don't remember exactly, between two sheets of waterproof plywood and steel strapped four ways. Naturally about a dozen government numbers had to be stenciled on the piece of plywood before they could be shipped. There was a rumor around the plant (I don't know how true) that a freighter carrying a big load of these sheets to Russia had been torpedoed and sunk in the North Atlantic.

The Rieke Corporation had an order to furnish closures for Jerry Cans for the army and a rubber gasket was needed for a seal. They gave us the job of molding the gaskets for them. The stock to be used had to conform to a lot of government specs and tests, such as being stable in oils, gasoline, solvents, pressure tests, hardness, and a big list of others. The lab came up with a stock that met these tests but still were required to retest frequently and send a report to the government that they were still conforming. We had steel molds built, trimming dies made and started production. After trimming, each gasket had to be inspected individually before packing and shipping. We set up a line of women employees using magnifying glasses to do this job. This was a monotonous job and we had a few temper tantrums from the inspectors but we did produce thousands of these gaskets.

We set up one area in the plant to machine laminated plastic parts for a plant in Chicago. They had a contract to produce these parts from the laminated stock they made in their plant, but they needed to subcontract the machining of the parts to keep up with the demand. The company decided to add this production to our plant to make jobs for some of the people, who had been laid off because of the shut down of the toy department. We set up about six small lathes, three large lathes, six or eight drill presses, a milling machine and two saws. Gary Penland would drive our truck to Chicago and pick up a load of material and the blueprints needed for the parts to be produced and we would machine the parts, and send them back on the next trip. We would send the prints that needed fixtures to the machine shop, and they would build what was needed. For a lot of the parts it was just a matter of sawing the stock to the proper outside dimensions, and putting the pieces in a steel drilling fixture, and drilling the proper size holes as required. For round parts that needed to be lathe turned they would send us round stock that would be sawed to the proper length and then turned on the lathes. All these operations had to be checked with micrometers because of the close tolerances. The women in this department got to be very good at reading "mics" even though they didn't know a micrometer from a hole in the ground when they first started. The two tablesaws were precision machines. The

saw blades would stay sharp quite a while on some of the stock, but we had some stock to saw that you were lucky to get one cut across a twenty four inch sheet without having to put on a sharpened blade. We set up a saw sharpening machine in the machine shop and kept one man busy nearly full time sharpening saw blades.

We had set up a dust collector to take dust from the machines to a hopper outside the plant and that sucker would catch fire every so often, not enough to cause any serious problems but enough smoke to drive the operators out of the department.

This was an interesting part of our war production. Every week we would have new and different parts to work on. There were a lot of details to work out, but it sure wasn't boring.

I don't remember who our contact man was who contacted the procurement office in Chicago. He would bring back prints and specs of items up for bids and we would have to submit quotes if we thought we could do the job. It was pretty tough for us to compete with the big rubber companies. They seemed to be able to outbid us on most of the "plum" jobs. We made sample stocks and one cavity molds for a lot of the items to see whether we could produce them. One such was a cover for an artillery shell. It had to be a very hard stock. It had to withstand a four foot drop on the end of a thirty pound shell without fracturing. After a number of tries we had to give it up because we just couldn't satisfy the specs.

Another was a round rubber cushion to fit into a round fiber board tube so the point of a shell would be cushioned during shipping. This we worked out pretty well, but I guess we were outbid by the big companies.

The company was awarded the Army Navy "E" for their part in the war effort. The presentation was made at the Court Theater and Bill Batdorf made the acceptance speech. Bill made a speech that was much better than the professional speakers you hear today. The men working with Bill knew he could speak loud and clear after someone had put "reclaim dust" in his pipe tobacco.

Those war years were a little hectic at Auburn Rubber but the company and employees all dug in and were proud of what they did to help bring those years to an end.

POST WAR YEARS

There were a lot of changes made in the plant after the war was over. The company had installed a five hundred pound batch Banbury mixer, that extended into and was operated from the second floor. After reinforcing the rest of the second floor, it was used for compounding the batches and for storing materials. There were other building and equipment changes made during this period so that we would be able to meet the competition.

When we were able to get materials back into civilian production after the war we started making forty inch soling sheets. We had moved the curing presses from the backroom to the old sole packing department, and had added a number of new forty inch presses on the north end of the line. The shoe factories were anxious to get these sheets so they could get to producing new shoes. The sheets were made in several colors and thicknesses and they wanted them sanded on one side to make them look and feel like suede. A big sander was purchased that would do this job and we produced thousands of these sheets with one side sanded. The sheets were shipped on skids and banded with steel straps. Herb Glick owned a couple of trucks and he hauled the sheets directly to the shoe factories. This made a pretty good deal for Herb as most of the shoe factories were in the East. A lot of our raw materials came from the East and he could run loaded both ways.

There was a machine on the market that could slice a sheet this size in half so we figured we could mold a sheet twice as thick and slice it into two sheets. We bought the machine and it did work but required a lot of adjusting and maintenance, so we never used it too long. As I remember we sold it to a firm that was making sponge rubber and it did a good job on the softer stock.

We produced "White Cap" gaskets for a firm in Chicago. This was a special white stock that was extruded in tubes and cured on steel mandrels. We had a lathe cut machine that would slice these tubes into thin round gaskets to be used in the tin lids for the glass jars the Chicago company made. They finally designed a different type of seal for the lids but we did make them thousands of gaskets.

It was decided that rubber balls would be a good addition to the toy line. These balls were to be pressurized with a chemical pill so preforms would have to be made before the balls could be cured. Ferd Thurman designed the preform and curing molds. The correct shape of the preform had to be determined and castings made and machined and the finished mold was bolted in an old rubber press. A vacuum line was piped to each half of the mold, a sheet of stock was laid over the bottom half and the vacuum turned on. This sucked the stock down into the cavities. A chemical pill was placed in each cavity and about a spoonful of water was added. Another sheet of stock was sucked up in the top half of the mold and the press was closed. This squeezed the



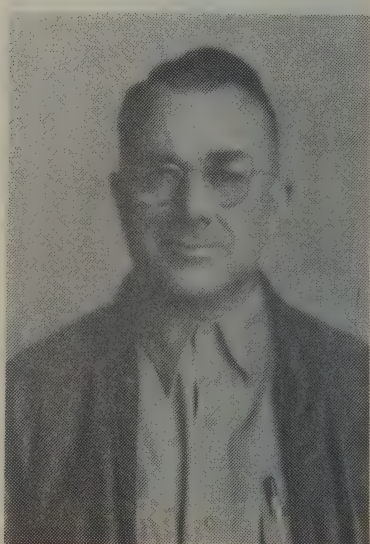
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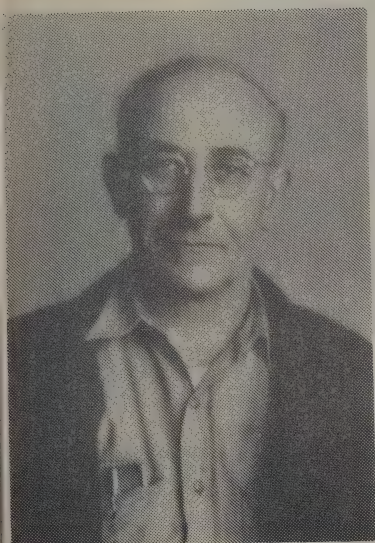
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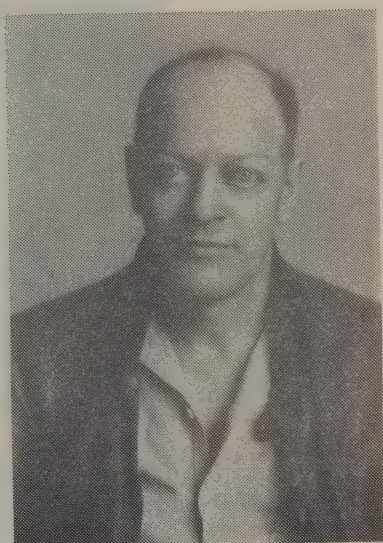
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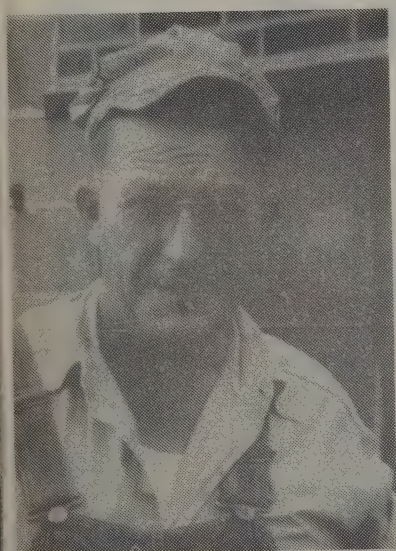
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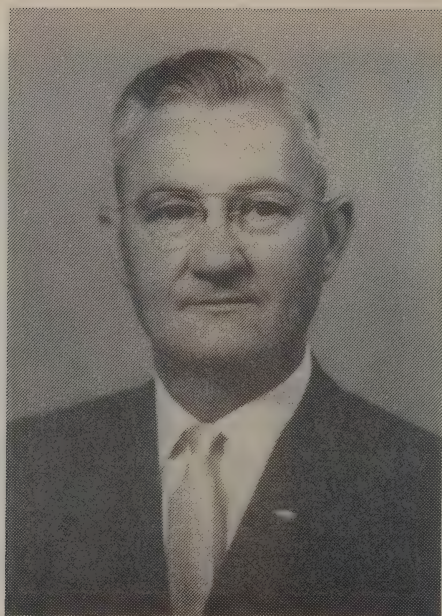
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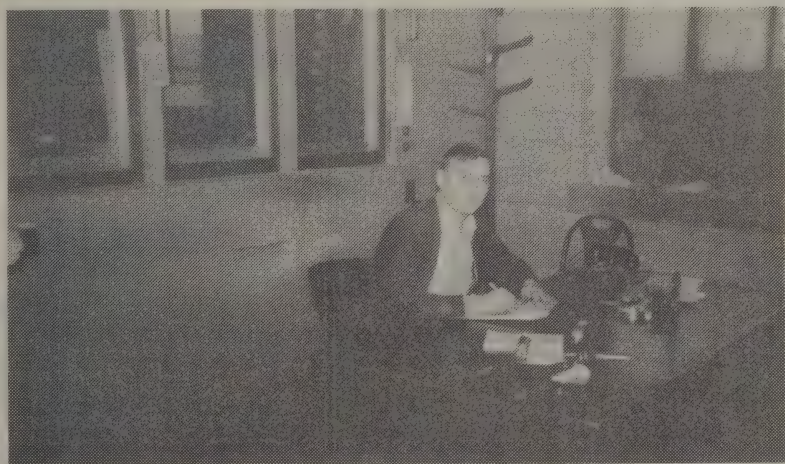
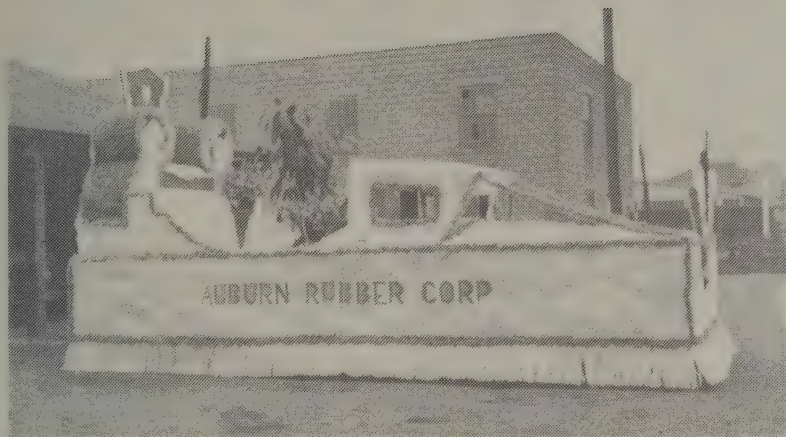
MILO LINK



C. L. BOGER



ROLAND MUHN















**HELEN CARR, C. L. BOGER,
GEORGE CARR, HAROLD LINK**

After the balls were cured they had to have a base coat of white paint. For this Ferd designed a conveyor with wire fingers to hold the balls which would spin when passing automatic spray guns. After spraying they traveled on around the conveyor long enough to be thoroughly dry before they could be taken off. They were then put on another conveyor and through a spray set up to be decorated. The decorating was set up with a top and bottom spray mask with the design of the decoration cut in them and turned in front of a couple of spray guns. With two spray guns (and top and bottom spray mask) we could use two different colors of paint giving us a finished ball with the top one color and the bottom another color.

We made a lot of these balls, I think in about four different sizes. I don't remember when we discontinued or why, but it did cause a lot of headaches until we finally got it all worked out.

A firm in Chicago was making a line of swim fins, masks, goggles, and snorkles for some reason they wanted to sell all their molds, inventory of supplies, and molded goods. After carefully checking the deal and the company, the sales department thought this would be a good addition to our line. The molds and everything that went with the deal were purchased and moved into the plant. We didn't have too much trouble molding the rubber parts and the lenses, snorkle tubes, buckles, and fasteners were all purchased parts, but we did spend quite a lot of time working out the assembly and packing. We did get it all worked out and were able to produce these parts for quite a while.

Those post war years were a busy time for Auburn Rubber. Besides all the plant changes, and getting our old line of products back in production these were all the new items to try out and new manufacturing processes to be made. We did quite a lot of molding for other plants, such as automotive parts, lathe cut gaskets for Rieke's drum closures and various other items.

As our line of toys increased and our soling sheet business built up we slowly phased out this extra work.

Dave Sellew was a person who was willing to try anything and give a person a free hand to work it out as long as the costs were in reason. Some of the things we tried we just couldn't work out. For example, Rieke's Flex Spout. A mold was made for this item and we tried all kinds of stock but the rubber parts did not do the job they wanted so they set up a plastic molding machine and molded the item out of plastic.

It was a very interesting time to work for Auburn Rubber.

THE CONNELLSVILLE PLANT

It was in 1946 that a small rubber plant in Connellsville, Pennsylvania came up for sale. Since there was no room in Auburn to set up our toy operation without building and since it would be closer to the eastern markets and supplies, Auburn Rubber decided to look it over. It seems the owner passed away and his son and another partner lacked the operating capital to keep it going and they wanted to sell. The main building was a three story brick building that had once been a silk mill and was in very good shape. It had been set up as a rubber plant with mills, extruders, curing presses and other rubber machinery and was making heels, some soles, gaskets and various other rubber items including blow out patches. Auburn bought the plant.

Auburn was to furnish the personnel to set up the plant and get it started and then help to train the people to run it. Bob Lochner was sent down to be the Plant Superintendent and Nels Pettibone was to be the Plant Manager. Other people from Auburn would spend a week at a time there as needed. Mike Hornett would go down to help set up the press line, Ferd Thurman to design and set up the toy equipment, Ike Miller to help with the equipment set up and to organize the maintenance department, Cliff Keifer to organize the accounting and office systems, Bob George to work on the trimming and dipping. Jack Anderson was moved down to take charge of the finishing department. I made several trips down to

help with various phases of the set up. Most of the people who worked at the plant when it was purchased were kept on but a lot of new people had to be hired.

It was a little rough going from Auburn to Connellsville. We would often get on the B&O at Garrett around midnight and get down there around seven or eight in the morning. If you couldn't sleep in a berth on the train you weren't too sharp the next day. Coming back was just as bad. I think we left around nine or ten in the evening and got in to Garrett early in the morning. The "Blue Moon" Tavern was right next to the station so we would usually stop in there for a little "potion" to ease the ride home and this sometimes caused some interesting incidents on the train.

We set up the finishing department on the third floor and trimming and dipping on the first floor right next to the press line. Ferd designed the dipping conveyor so that it could be unloaded on to the finish conveyor on the third floor. The second floor was set up as the shipping department and orders were sent down conveyors directly into trucks. Bob Miturko was hired to take charge of shipping.

The plant started producing and shipping and seemed to be running pretty smooth. Dave Sellew was always willing to send people down to help if any problems came up.

There were a few incidents that occurred in getting started. One I remember was a fire we had in one of our lacquer tanks. One of the maintenance men was using a welder near the tanks and they caught fire. The city fire department was called and the first thing they did was to turn their hose on the tanks and blew burning lacquer all over the press room. Scott Glover got there about that time and just walked over and slipped the tin lids on the tanks and snuffed the fire out. They were careful to see that the tanks were covered before working around them after that. The city fire department made a study of the plant to have some idea of how to handle any fires that might occur in the future. I think we did have a couple more but there were no problems.

The plant was running and producing in fair shape but after a few years Dave Sellew decided that we should build in Auburn and bring the operation back. I think it was to reduce overhead and management costs and to reduce intra-plant trucking costs. Also I think they had a buyer that would take it off their hands at a fair price. The buyer was an industry right next to the plant that fabricated steel and they wanted it for a warehouse.

Auburn started building a new cement block building across the alley from the old shipping room and it included a new set of factory offices, a new shipping room and a new toy department.

When Ferd Thurman was released from the Navy, Dave hired him as a process engineer. Ferd had spent his enlistment in a government research lab and knew rubber from A to Z. Ferd designed a conveyor for the toy finishing room that we called the "Merry Go Round". It was an oblong conveyor with a steel mesh top for a working surface. the dip machine was located at one end and the parts were unloaded directly to this conveyor. The spray booths, wheeling fixture, hand decorating and packing were set up around the outside of the conveyor. The operators performed all the necessary operations as the parts went by their station and if they missed some parts they just went on around and were finished as they came back. This eliminated most of the stock handling between the operations.

Ferd also designed a small wire clip to assemble axles and wheels to the molded bodies of our wheeled toys. We used this method of assembly until we quit making rubber toys. We called these clips "Hog Rings" which pretty well describes them.

When the Connellsville plant was finally sold the management people were asked if they wanted to move to Auburn. To get them acquainted with Auburn, Dave had them come up to look the town over. Since most of them were hunters he had Tom Hassett and Mike Hornett plan a hunting trip for them up near Fremont that was a favorite hunting area for Mike and Tom. We all had a good hunt and a big steak dinner in the evening. Don't remember whether we got any game but we had a real nice get together.

When the plant finally closed Nels Pettibone decided not to come back to Auburn. I think he took a job at Johnson Rubber Company. Bob Lochner moved back and took the job as Assistant Superintendent to Boger. Scott Glover, Vince Marcheletta, Jack Anderson, Don Bradley, Pearl Harshman, and Dick Hart all moved to Auburn. Bob Grimm and Evanelle Harshman stayed at Connellsville for a while, Bob was to see to the clean up and moving of the equipment and Evanelle was to clear up the office and take care of the necessary correspondence. When this was all cleared up they both moved to Auburn.

It seemed a shame to sell the plant after all the time and effort everyone had put into it but I guess that's progress.

PLASTIC MOLDING

The first plastic machine was an old used machine that Dave Sellow found on the market and thought it would be a good idea for us to start playing around with plastic toys. We set the machine up in the old garage across the street from the office. That was a rough looking piece of equipment. The electrical controls were in bad shape, wires off, and parts missing. It really looked hopeless. The heating cylinder that melted the plastic had a jacket around it that was filled with oil. The oil was heated electrically and this plasticized the material. This type of heating cylinder was a little dangerous and caused serious burns to the operators. Dave still thought we could make it run so he got Wayne Smith to work on the electrical part and asked me to work with Wayne as his "Gofor". Wayne worked on that machine for about a week and finally got it operating. Arnold Link started building a mold to try out in the machine. This would be a little different than a rubber mold because the cavities had to have water lines running through them to cool the plastic after injection.

Dave Sellow was a good man to work for. Most of us didn't know a plastic machine from a butter churn. By cut and fit and tips we could pick up from trade magazines, and outsiders, we got that old machine running. Arnold finished the mold, I think it had four little ball player figures in it, got some acetate material and molded some parts. They turned out pretty good but

they were hard. We needed something with more of the feel of rubber and with some flexibility.

We played with that old machine for quite a while but we could see that we could never use it in production. It did show us that plastic was going to replace rubber in toys in the not too far off future.

I think it was somewhere around 1953 that we purchased the first new Reed-Prentise plastic molding machine. Mr. Sellew was having some trouble at that time and was in the hospital, but he insisted he wanted to see that machine so they brought him down to the plant in a wheelchair so he could see it.

The chemical companies and our laboratory people started working on materials that could be molded into toys. It had to be flexible, cheap, and unbreakable. After a lot of tests they found that a vinyl material would do the job and we could mix the material in our plant. We bought a special mixer with a jacket around the body that was piped to steam and water. The vinyl material was loaded into the mixer along with fillers and plasticizers and mixed with steam for a certain length of time to work the plasticizers into the vinyl. The steam was turned off, and the water turned on, and the material was mixed until cool. We ended up with a material that was about the consistency of cornmeal. This material was then weighed in fiber drums, dry color added, then tumbled to mix the color. It was then ready to be molded into toys. This material was a little

ticklish to mold. If the cylinders on the machines overheated or if the material laid in the cylinder too long it tended to decompose and give off some sort of acid that would corrode the cylinders. The cylinders would have to be taken off the machines, the insert pressed out, both parts cleaned, and polished before it could be used again. This was a big maintenance problem until we learned how to run this material.

From that start we continued to buy more machines and converted and remodeled the old rubber items to be made of plastic. Besides that we added a lot of new items to our line.

Most of our molds were built by Ferriot Brothers in Akron. They would model the items, make patterns and castings and give us a finished mold ready to use. They had several machines in their shop and did quite a lot of custom molding for us.

A couple of items we continued to make in rubber were an indoor horseshoe set and some hammers and hatchets. We made these for several years and were always a good selling item but when we converted them to plastic they did not seem to sell as well as the rubber.

A company in Toledo made spray masks for us and we mounted them in our spray booths for decorating. We kept trying to automate this spraying operation but we could never get the same quality that we could with hand spraying. We did have a couple units that worked out fairly decent. Cleaning the spray masks was a dirty unpleasant job and

we were not able to keep help on it for very long. We tried a lot of ideas to help this job but were never able to improve it too much.

There were many new and different plastic materials being put on the market in the fifties and we were continually checking them out to try and improve our toy line but they could not match the vinyl for flexibility. Since our toys were advertized as having a "rubber like feel" vinyl seemed to be the only material that would live up to the advertising.

The sales department thought that blister packing our items on cards would help sales, so we bought a vacuum forming machine and started making our own blisters out of sheet material. For sealing the blisters to cards we bought a heat sealer and then had the tool room make a turn table with several fixtures on it so that the parts could be loaded while others were sealing. This proved to be a good way to merchandise the items. We continued this method for quite a number of years.

A chemical company in Pittsburgh had been working on a styrene material that would expand with heat and the company thought this might be used for life rings, swim floats, and other items for water toys and would be a good addition to our swim fin line. We made a trip to Pittsburgh and went through the whole process with them. The only piece of equipment we would have to purchase would be a pre-expander or as we called it "a popcorn popper". Since we had a good source for aluminum castings we could

make our own molds very easily. The material was put in the pre-expander and with steam was expanded about one half and then blown into large canvas storage bags we had fastened to the ceiling. The material was blown from the bags into the molds. The molds were clamped shut and the steam turned on for a certain time. The steam was then turned off and water turned on to cool the parts. When the mold was opened, the steam had finished expanding the material forcing it into all the contours of the mold and formed a smooth skin on the outside of the part. This material was the same you see today being used in packing, insulating sheets used in new houses, and a hundred and one other different items. I wouldn't say we were the first to use this material but I do think we were one of the first to use it for toy items.

The management of Auburn Rubber was always willing to try anything that might improve their toy line. When we got into plastics there were so many new developments that it was a busy time for everyone.

THE QUARTER CENTURY CLUB

It was in 1954 that the general manager of the company Mr. G.E. Yocguelet, decided it would be nice to recognize the employees who had been with the company for a number of years. It was not to be an elaborate affair but just a little token to show that the company appreciated their long years of service. It was to be a nice dinner and get together. A gold wrist watch was given as a keepsake of the occasion. It was to be called "The Quarter Century Club" and everyone who had been with the company for twenty-five years was automatically a member.

A constitution was set up and officers were to be elected for a one year term. A provision was set up to send flowers to members and their families in case of death or hospitalization. Any finances needed were to be furnished by the company. Most everyone enjoyed these get togethers.

There were thirteen charter members in 1954. The next year there were twenty members and the third year there were twenty-three. For a small plant in a small town this seemed to indicate that Auburn Rubber wasn't such a bad place to work.

The membership at the 1956 meeting was as follows:

Harold Bauman	27	Harold Link	32
Clarren Boger	33	Herbert Mannon	26
Harold Boger	27	Earl McNabb	40
John Boger	27	Paul Miller	26
Frank Boucher	25	Linn Murray	46
Helen Carr	33	Agnes Parrett	26
George Carr	35	Forest Robbins	27
Earl Dewitt	26	Lee Shimer	26
Thomas Hassett	26	Joseph Vachon	26
Charles Hornett	37	Carl Wolford	30
Arnold Link	25	Marie Zulich	29
Floyd Link	25		

DEMING, NEW MEXICO

When it was announced in 1959 that the toy division of Auburn Rubber had been sold and was to be moved to Deming, it was quite a blow to the people of Auburn. Especially to the employees of Auburn Rubber Co. It was the main topic of conversation for a long time around the area.

It seems there was some law in the state of New Mexico that allowed cities to float bond issues to buy industries that would provide jobs for their people. I won't try to explain all the details. Deming was a farming and cotton growing area. With all the new machinery that would do the jobs of hand labor, it left a lot of Spanish Americans available for factory jobs, especially the women.

Deming was to build the plant and Auburn was to furnish the skilled personnel to set up the plant and work out all the production problems. It was a hard decision for the people who were asked to move to Deming. It meant pulling up stakes and moving to what we all thought was desert country. There were all the problems of changing schools in the middle of the year for the kids, selling homes in Auburn and buying homes in Deming and Amillion and other little details to work out. For the people who had spent their whole life in or near Auburn it was a tough decision to make.

The details were all worked out and construction was started at the plant site. Deming had an old airport that was used during the war to train army pilots. There were storage buildings, army barracks, railroad sidings, and they would build a building to be used as the main plant. One of the barracks buildings was to be rebuilt for offices and laboratory. Their future plans were for the whole area to be made into an industrial park. Paved streets, water and sewers were in so it wasn't too bad of an idea.

The move was to start somewhere around January or February of 1960. An engineering firm from Chicago was hired to go to Deming, check over the plant and lay it out for the machines and equipment that were to be moved. I was asked to go down with them. When we finally got to Deming I thought we had reached the end of the earth. (I think a lot of the Auburn people felt the same way when they first arrived). We spent three days down there and those two men from the engineering firm didn't know you were supposed to sleep at night. That was sure a rough trip for me, but we did get the job done and layout prints made. When we got there in December we used those prints to lay out the floor with chalk for every machine that was to be sent. When the machinery started arriving we could move it directly to its location.

The moving was to be done by trucks and everything went well except the weather. The Auburn people were used to cold weather but we still just about froze. The natives assured us it was a little unusual but it would be better "Manana".

The move went fairly well except for a couple of instances. Mr. Yocqulet shipped his Thunderbird in one of the trucks and when it arrived it had a flat tire. It seems when they loaded it they took it to Rieke's dock and somehow picked up a piece of scrap steel from a punch press. We had to buy a new tire before we could move it. Then one of the trucks hauling a plastic molding machine turned over somewhere on the way and beat up the plastic machine pretty bad. It had to have extensive repairs before it could be used.

Much of the credit must be given to the people at Auburn who loaded the trucks. They loaded machinery and equipment so that unloading could be accomplished without too many problems at the plant in Deming. It was still a big job unloading, but I imagine it was a bigger job loading.

Louis Royal, from Waterloo, was in charge of all the electrical installation and most of it was finished when the machines arrived. It was not a major problem to hook them up after they were unloaded and set in place.

We finally got all the machines hooked up, spray booths set, finishing conveyor in place, wheeling and other fixtures in place and we were ready to start hiring and training operators. The Spanish American people of Deming were nice polite people to work with. They caught on to the operations in a short time but since they talked to each other in Spanish we didn't know whether they were cussing us out or just gossiping. If you asked them to teach

you a few words of Spanish they were happy to do so. I often wondered if some of the words they taught us weren't a little bit "raunchy" because when we tried them, we either got a big grin or a mean looking scowl.

After a lot of set up changes and headaches we finally got our production line in pretty good shape. Shipments were going out and orders were coming in. We thought we might be able to ease off a bit and not have to work night and day but someone decided we should make a "Ginger Bread House". This was an item designed to look like a ginger bread house with moveable parts such as a mouse running up a clock, a cow jumping over the moon, a Humpty Dumpty and several other fairy tale characters. All the parts were to be movable so that a small child could turn them around, and slide them up and down with sound effects. It was to be made of styrene plastic so that most of the parts could be cemented together using a solvent for cement. The molds were built and samples were run. Some of the parts didn't fit close enough for a good cement job so the molds had to be corrected. After a few weeks of "cut and fit" we thought we were set to start production. After another spell of working day and night the production was going quite well. Orders were good and shipments were picking up. Everyone was patting themselves on the back until we started getting quite a few returns. To make a long story short, we ended up with a big warehouse full of returned ginger bread houses because parts

started falling off when the customers put the products on their counters. The word "Ginger Bread House" was about as bad as a cuss word around Auburn Rubber for a long while.

An idea came up... modeling clay would be a good addition to the toy line. A mixer was built, an extruder was set up and we were ready to start producing. The orders were not too promising so they thought maybe if we had better equipment it might help. Someone saw an ad for a "pug" mill for sale over in Phoenix that might be used in our mixing operation. I was asked to go over and look at it. Jim Buskirk was a pilot and he was to rent a plane at the airport and we would fly over. I should have known better than to take a plane trip with an ex-Army pilot. The first thing he did was to show me how to fly through a thunderhead. Needless to say I was sure glad to get that trip over with. The equipment we looked at wasn't what we could use. Someone found out that there was a plant for sale in New York that made plastic harmonicas and toy xylophones. I think it was Bob Lochner who went out to look the plant over to see whether it might fit into our operation. After a deal was worked out the plant was purchased. We were to get all the molds and equipment for making the items as well as several molding machines. We set everything up and got along quite well with the molding and assembly for a while. Now, molding the reeds for the harmonica was a precision job so we had the company in New York mold them for us for a while. We finally brought the

reed molds in and started to mold our own reeds. Each reed in a harmonica is tuned to a different tone so everything has to be nearly perfect when molding these out of plastic. Molding time, heat, pressure, and material had to all be regulated very close. The only way to find out whether we had the right combination of all the elements was to mold some parts, assemble them in a harmonica, and then have someone with a good musical ear blow and tell us how they sounded. We sure had a lot of "Klinkers" until we finally hit on the right combination. We did start molding some satisfactory parts. We were able to produce and sell quite a lot of the items. The reed molds finally wore enough that it was impossible to keep them in tune and rather than build new molds it was decided to drop the musical line.

The people in the town and the employees in the plant were very pleasant to be around. They would do anything to please you. They were always bringing in their native foods for you to taste. They showed the Auburn people what the word "Manana" meant. Their life style was much different than what we were used to but, you know, after a while it seemed a rather pleasant way to live. I am sure the people from Auburn, who spent some time in Deming, will recall many little details that happened in the plant and in the community. I believe the pleasant memories will outweigh the unpleasant.

PEOPLE

Over the years a lot of people spent a lot of time working at Auburn Rubber. I am sure no one could remember everyone that worked there but here are a few that everyone will remember.

Charles Hornett: "Mike" was the foreman of the press line and a long time fixture of the company. When molds in the press line had to be changed, Mike, as he would always say, would start "lugging iron".

Frank Boucher: "Whitey" always considered the calendar as his personal baby. Woe be to anyone touching the controls when he was calendaring stock. It was suspected that Whitey talked to that machine at times when nobody was around.

George and Helen Carr: George and Helen spent a good share of their life at Auburn Rubber, George on the press line and Helen as floor lady and in the shipping room.

The Machine Shop: Ed Hall, Ike Miller, Ray Kester, Les Winslow, Pap Link, Curt Link, Milo Link, Floyd Zehner, Red Glass, and many others from time to time, were the men who kept the company in good working order as well as building molds and equipment for the production lines.

The Laboratory: Morgan Rhodes, Charley Kitner, Jim Norton, Charley Cougil, Fred Quance, Bill Graham, Ray Cool and several others came up with the rubber compounds for the plant production. They had their hands full especially during the war when everything had to conform to government specs and had to be checked continually.

The Carpenter Shop: Daws Quaintance, Tom Hassett, and Hank Lung kept the buildings in repair and any other carpenter work required.

Bert Imhoff: When Bert left the company he and his wife took over the small restaurant across the street from the plant. Bert and his sandwich cart were a welcome sight at rest periods. Later the restaurant was run by Jack Krick and his wife. It was a popular gathering spot.

The Boiler Room: Don Leeson, Harold Boger, and John Dickson and several others kept the boiler operating and did the watchman service on weekends. The boilers were hand fired at first but were later changed over to stokers. There were very few shutdowns because of lack of steam.

Mill Room: Bob Riddle, Harold Bauman, Harold Harnish, and Beryl Heitz ram rodded the mill room. It wasn't the cleanest place to work but they were able to get the job done.

Lee Shimer: Lee was the salesman who contacted the shoe factories. If you wanted a good pair of shoes at cost Lee could always get them.

Earl Fribley: Earl was the contact with Ferriot Brothers in Akron. A trip to Akron with Earl was a history lesson. He could tell you what happened across Ohio during the Civil War and other events of history back as far as the Revolution.

Glen Talbert: Glen was the purchasing agent and was a stickler for details. When we wanted something ordered we would scratch it out on most any old piece of paper and if we complained when the order came in, Glen would dig out that piece of paper even if it was a year old, and show you that you got just what you ordered.

Clarren Boger: "Duck" was the plant superintendent who had a job to do and got it done. His door was always open to anyone who had a problem either business or personal.

Paul Lautzenhiser: Paul worked on the mill line and would often ride a bicycle back and forth from Hamilton. He brought in some "Mountain Oysters" one day for the mill room men to taste and when he told them what they were they just about lynched him.

Earl DeWitt: "Hog" was the smoothest working man on the press line. He didn't seem to be hurrying at all but he was always ahead of his partners at the end of a round.

Clarence Wyatt: Clarence was the compounder. He weighed and measured all the chemicals for the rubber batches and very seldom made a mistake or forgot an ingredient.

Ruth Wheeler Brandon: With forty or fifty girls in the toy finishing department Cy McNabb needed help and Ruth was asked to take the job. It wasn't an easy job watching over that many girls but Ruth seemed to get along real well. She and Cy made a good team.

We had a number of people, both men and women, in their high sixties and seventies working at Auburn Rubber and they could hold up their end as well as the younger employees.

This list of employees could go on and on and I am sure you will remember lots of others. These are just a few of the people I have worked with, hunted with, fished with and went through ups and downs with. They were all good people and a pleasure to be around.



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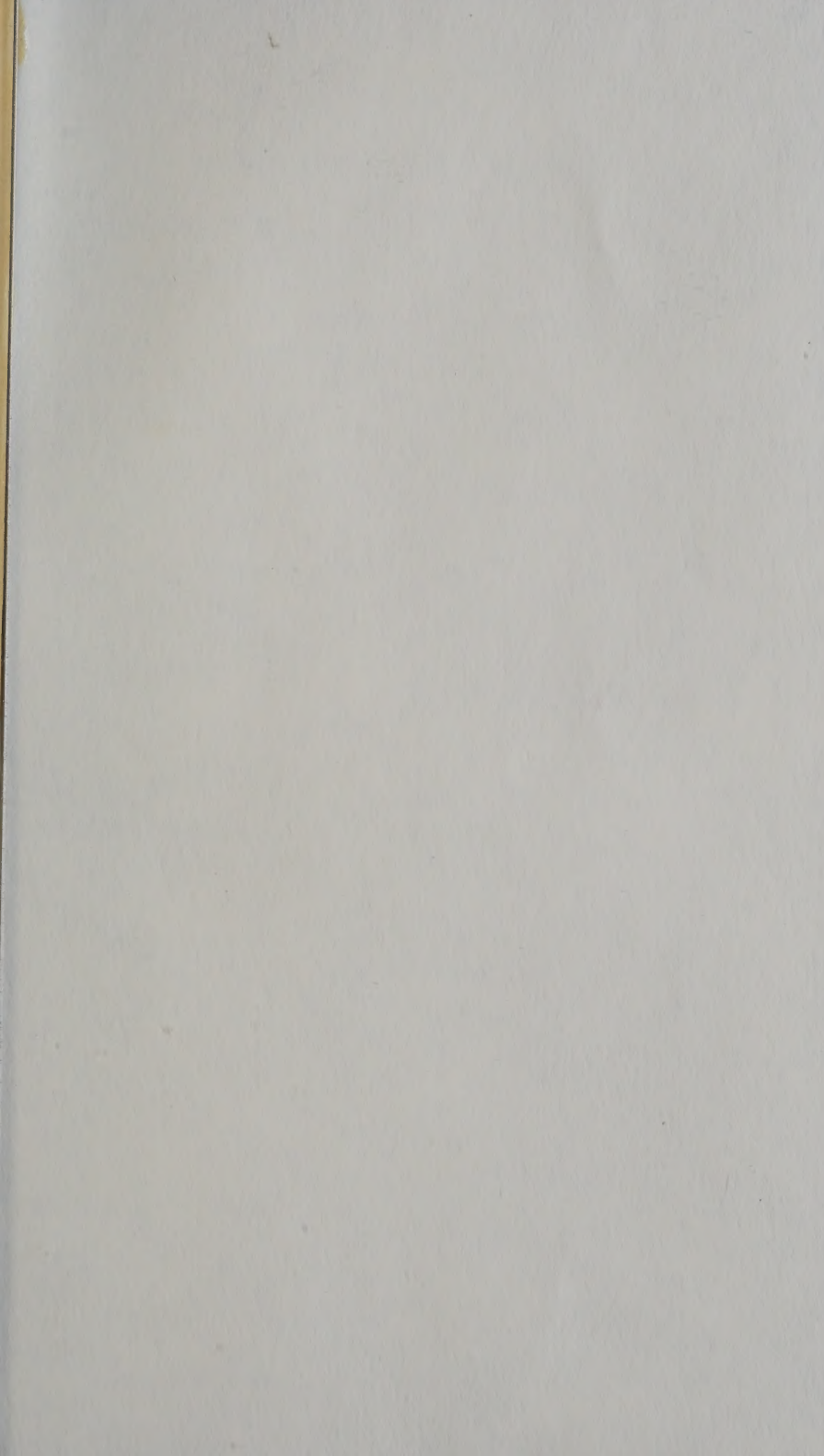
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